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ABSTRACT

There has been a decline in the enrollment in sociology courses and a decline in the number of students choosing to major in sociology. To counteract this decline, departments need to continue to offer a traditional academic sociology curriculum, but also need to offer stronger training in research methods and statistics, interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving, and training and experience in practical settings and interaction. The sociology department at Southwest Texas State University has taken steps to incorporate these applied skills in their program; they have developed a bachelor of science program, a multi-disciplinary, multi-tract master's program in applied sociology, and an internship program. The applied undergraduate sociology program is designed to prepare sociology majors for business and governmental positions by emphasizing applied skills. The Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) offers a modular concept with four tracts of study in the areas of gerontology, industry and social work, social studies, and social control. The Research Institute for Community Enhancement was set up to offer students internships whereby they gain practical experience and provide help and service to community organizations. (LH)

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# ADAPTING TO APPLIED SOCIOLOGY:

# ONE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE

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ADAPTING TO APPLIED SOCIOLOGY:
ONE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE*

A crisis exists in sociology today. While this perception is not new (Gouldner, 1970), the crisis is probably not one that centers on the theoretical structures that sociologists use to describe and explain the social world. Instead, the crisis rests with the heart and substance of what we as sociologists teach. Perhaps the clearest sign of our difficulty as a discipline is that students do not seek us out as they did in the sixties and early seventies. Not only is this not flattering to our self-esteem, it undercuts the base of our existence. Most universities cannot continue to support disciplines which do not positively contribute to fiscal stability.

Table 1 gives enrollment and major trends since 1972 in one sociology program at a southwestern university. They show a marked decline. Majors have dropped by 82.5 percent. Enrollments have declined from 1784 in Fall 1972 to 1136 in Fall 1981, a 36.5 percent reduction.

Not limited to just a few universities, what explains this marked decline? The fundamental reason, in our view, is that as employment prospects remain uncertain, students seek disciplines which provide them with marketable skills e.g. accounting, computer information systems, interior design, and fashion merchandising. Sociology departments which offer specific skills, such as counseling, research, computer and statistical analysis, may have found themselves to be less seriously impacted by enrollment shifts.

*An earlier version of this manuscript has been submitted to Teaching Sociology/

TABLE 1

SOCIOLOGY UNDERGRADUATES

| FALL SEMESTER | MAJOR | MINOR | ENROLLMENT |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1981 | 66 | 143 | 1136 |
| 1980 | 65 | 172 | 1256 |
| 1979 | 94 | NA | 1366 |
| 1978 | 137 | 214 | 1691 |
| 1977 | 235 | NA | 1791 |
| 1976 | 306 | 275 | 1797 |
| 1975 | 345 | 281 | 1743 |
| 1974 | 362 | 304 | 1882 |
| 1973 | 375 | 313 | 2004 |
| 1972 | 357 | 308 | 1784 |

A recent survey of employers of sociologists in non-academic settings (Lyson and Squires, 1982) suggests that the substance of sociology is unimportant in comparison to the skills we teach. Of 65 non-academic employers who responded to the survey, 89.2 percent and 78.2 percent claimed that research methods and statistics, respectively, were important for employment, while 26.2 percent noted criminology and only 13.8 percent saw theory as significant. According to Lyons and Squires' respondents, sociologists had four major shortcomings: lack of sophistication about the realities of non-academic life (52.3 percent); limited knowledge of important substantive areas outside sociology (46.2 percent); limited training in research methods (44.6 percent), and inability to communicate with non-academians (43.1 percent). Only 7.7 percent reported a lack of sociological expertise as a shortcoming.

A limited survey of non-academic employers of persons with a B.A. in sociology has produced similar findings (Watson, 1982: 132). The point is that we are valued more for what we can do, rather than what we know about a sociological specialty. These skills are not the exclusive domain of sociology, nor is the knowledge which employers need limited to sociology. The directions for alteration of the sociology curriculum lie in the area of applied skills. While we should continue to offer a traditional, academic sociology curriculum, we must consider a different emphasis

and/or programatic tracks. The new elements should include stronger training in research methods and statistics, interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving, training and experience in practical settings and interaction.

## DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSES

Given that a crisis in sociology exists, a number of possible responses seem to be available to departments.

### The Hang-On Response

Enrollments, like governments, rise and fall. The substance of sociology remains fundamentally unchanged by the fashions of undergraduate student interest. Today's student, perhaps more so than his predecessor, needs the substantive, critical introduction to the social world. Faculty are not trained, experienced, or interested in significantly altering the curriculum or direction of sociology. Some argue that as the economy continues to deteriorate, students will become more concerned with the structure and processes of society. Others argue that as the economy improves, students will become less occupationally oriented and return to the liberal arts, including the social sciences. This departmental response leaves us waiting for the tides to turn rather than taking action to affect our futures.

Universities across the country are turning away from the elective curriculum of the sixties and seventies to more structured curricula. The growth of interest in general education is associated with the increasing vocational orientations of our students. Perhaps it is unnecessary to fix

the departmental curriculum; what needs adjustment are the requirements that universities place upon their students. The substance of sociology should remain unchanged; we survive as a discipline by providing the appropriate background education for the students who choose to major in the occupationally oriented disciplines which apply the knowledge that the basic social sciences have developed.

While this approach leaves the substance of sociology unchanged, it fails to address the problem of need for change in the sociology curriculum for majors. Any department that experiences an 85 percent reduction in majors in ten years needs to examine curriculum content. The survival of the discipline depends not only on satisfactory enrollments but on the recruitment and training of our disciplinary successors. We must examine whether what we are offering meets the demands of the academic and other marketplaces.

Keeping the Children at Home

Sociology as a discipline has been and is successful. The knowledge that we have created has been applied by government, industry, and other disciplines. While social work is a practice oriented profession, much of the research knowledge that it has generated and uses is sociological. The distinctions between criminology and criminal justice are fine and fuzzy. The creation of criminal justice as a separate academic discipline was a function of the Nixon Administration's war on crime and the liberal-radical stigma that sociologists have in the eyes

of the law enforcement and corrections practitioners. The art and science of management as taught in colleges of business today is applied social science. Sociology departments which have retained these program areas, whatever the difficulties, may be faring better than those departments which pursue the model established by the natural sciences. One of the authors, in an informal survey of chairmen at state funded colleges and universities in a midwestern state, found that those departments that have retained social work, criminology, corrections, and/or criminal justice were doing much better in both protecting majors and enrollments than those which had separated from social work and/or criminal justice. This response protects, what is in essense but not in name, sociology.

Applied Sociology

The third response is the creation of new applied sociology programs both in name and substance. In our view, these programs must have four elements to be successful.

1. A curriculum which emphasizes sociological research, data analysis, and communication skills over traditional content areas.
2. Student internship opportunities, undergraduate and graduate, in business, social service, and government agencies.
3. Research opportunities in practical settings which allow the student to practice, under faculty direction, his or her acquired skills.

4. Interdisciplinary education to familiarize the student with knowledge areas that are useful for resolving a range of practical problems.

In the case study tradition, we summarize some of the problems and their resolution utilized by one department in redirecting toward applied sociology. The approach discussed focuses on both teaching and research. It is interdisciplinary in curriculum, research, and advising. The change to an applied focus includes development of internships, client research, and a research institute.

## ONE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE

### AN UNDERGRADUATE APPLIED PROGRAM

Applied sociology programs began to emerge in the early nineteen-seventies (Boros and Adamek, 1981:388), and have become increasingly common with the beginning of the nineteen-eighties (Fritz, 1982). Although there is not clear agreement as to the meaning of applied sociology (DeMartini, 1979:333; Rossi, 1981:445-447), there does appear to be a widespread consensus that at the undergraduate level applied sociology programs should include an internship or practicum (DeMartini, 1979:337; Satariano and Rogers, 1979:355). The internship is generally envisioned as a means by which the sociology major not only has an opportunity to apply some of his or her sociological knowledge and skills, but also, very importantly has a chance for "direct contact with the 'real world' beyond the campus (DeMartini, 1979:343)." A recent survey of Texas

employers listing with the College Placement Annual reports that 90 percent (N-108) of the responding employers believe that internships enhance employability (Johnson and Watts, 1983).

It is in this context that a Bachelor of Science in Applied Sociology degree has been developed. Surveys of graduates from the department being discussed during the nineteen-seventies reveal the vast majority of undergraduate sociology majors ultimately entered business or governmental positions. The training which these majors received in empirical research and computer usage seems to be particularly significant in qualifying many of them for the kinds of jobs which they secured.

The new degree plan is conceived as an addition to existing degree programs in the department. Students desiring a broad liberal arts background as pre-professional education for such fields as law and the ministry or wishing to pursue academic careers in sociology at the university level complete the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree. Those wishing to teach in the public schools complete the requirements for either the Bachelor of Arts or the Bachelor of Science in Education degrees. Individuals wanting certification in the social service fields fulfill the requirements for the Bachelor of Social Work.

The Applied Sociology degree program is expected to better prepare majors in sociology for business and governmental positions by greater emphasis on writing, research methods, field experience, and selection of applied minors. Minors are recommended in such areas as public administration

(political science), urban and regional planning (geography), business administration, computer science, criminal justice, and social work.

Students pursuing the new Applied Sociology degree plan complete a minimum of thirty semester hours in sociology. Besides the standard introduction to sociology course, majors are required to complete courses in SPSS, statistics, social research, theory, and an internship.

The internship course is a senior level class envisioned as a culminating work/study experience for students. All required courses must be completed before the student is assigned a field position. A student's academic minor is considered a significant variable in the type of field placement sought for the student. The internship is viewed as primarily an opportunity for the student to have a work experience in a setting related to his or her general occupational goals and sociological education. Hence, field placements may be in a variety of settings in business, manufacturing, or governmental offices.

While the most common internships in applied sociology programs have been in social service agencies (Satariano and Rogers, 1979:360), our program directs most students interested in human service occupations into the social work program. Hence, the applied sociology program is not thought of as training for social service careers. As Watson (1982:133) has pointed out, "Opportunities exist in a wide range of employment situations in addition to the traditional social service

agencies, including industry, technical (consulting) firms, construction, utilities, and medical settings."

Another unique feature of the applied sociology program being developed is the inclusion of a course in scientific writing taught in the Department of English. Emphasis in this class is on learning to write formal reports as opposed to traditional term papers and on the reading of scientific rather than literary essays.

The applied degree program also differs from the traditional liberal arts program in sociology in that the major is encouraged to study computer science in fulfilling the usual mathematics requirements for a bachelor of arts degree. This is in addition to the experience in computers which the student receives in the three required sociology courses focusing on SPSS, general statistics, and social research. Thus the applied sociology degree addresses the deficiencies most frequently cited by non-academic employers of sociologists -- research training, substantive knowledge outside of sociology, communication, and awareness of the work setting beyond the schoolroom (Lyson and Squires, 1982).

The problems in implementing an applied sociology program have been detailed elsewhere (Boros and Adamek, 1981; Satariano and Rogers, 1979). The experiences described in these reports need to be studied carefully for learning how to get applied programs successfully off the ground and keep them flying. Through

creative professional management, the discipline can serve students, the university, and the community while avoiding becoming the Braniff of the academic world.

AN APPLIED MASTER'S PROGRAM

Our department has also decided to move in an applied direction at the graduate level. The program has been conceived from the beginning to take advantage of both inter-disciplinary content and the principle of a track/modular design.

Student Need and Faculty Response

Some recent graduates and the older, non-traditional graduate students, have found that their undergraduate degrees did not really prepare them for the work world. These students have little interest in allowing themselves to be forced into a program where a particular "disciplinary" orientation, with what they perceive as little relevance to their work, is provided by faculty with no interest in what they do for a living. They are not usually looking for an "easy" or "cheap" program; they are rather looking for a program with relevance to their life situations.

As the faculty initiated discussions about moving in an applied direction, we looked at several different types of programs. In our review of currently existing programs we found that there were a number of possible organizational types that could be used.

It was decided that the existing Graduate Studies Committee should also constitute an ad hoc committee to investigate the

possibility of an applied program at the graduate level. This committee was given the responsibility of making recommendations in three areas.

1. Should we attempt to develop an applied program totally "in-house" or should this type of program be developed around an interdisciplinary model?
2. Should we immediately begin to create new courses for an applied program or should we use existing curriculum (with some appropriate modifications) to initiate the program?
3. Should we have one basic or "core" applied program in an attempt to meet the needs of all applied students or should some type of tracking system be developed to deal with these diverse needs?

The first issue addressed by the committee was program need. In our detailed discussion with current students, graduates, and applicants, it became apparent that students were talking about needs not in one, but in four areas. One major or "core" program could not realistically meet these diverse needs. We, therefore, began to work with the notion of four separate tracks tailored to the needs of different audiences with the possibility of addition or deletion in the future.

These four tracks were called Gerontology, Industry and Work, Social Studies, and Social Control, developed

under a degree option known as Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS). All tracks were designed from an interdisciplinary perspective and consists of a modular concept in which there is an "Entry Module" in effective communication skills, an "Academic Module" containing courses from several departments related to the student's main areas of interest, and an "Exit Module" normally devoted to skill and research type of courses. In all tracks, with the exception of the Social Control program, sociology will constitute the majority of the student's coursework. The advisor for the track forms a committee with two other persons representing related areas in the program. The major advisor comes from the area in which the student is to complete the majority of coursework and other committee members are from the related areas.

While the interdisciplinary approach is the most sound from an academic point of view, it also provides a convenient mechanism for program design. It has been noted by others (Dynes and Deutscher, 1981:15) that more interdisciplinary work should be encouraged in the applied programs. Jeffery (1979:119) has described the MASS (Master of Applied Social Science) program at Florida A&M University. Students in this program take courses in a Principal Discipline and at least three Cognate Disciplines. Employers in the business and public sectors could "care less" about discipline based theoretical and conceptual perspectives; they are looking

for an integrated set of problem solving skills for practical use on the job. Students are trained to be client oriented (DeMartini, 1980).

Curriculum

While relying upon other academic departments to strengthen our students content and method knowledge, the core sociology curriculum became increasingly significant. A review of the existing curriculum showed that much of what we teach does have an applied dimension. It was decided to strengthen and emphasize the applied dimension, as in the graduate research methods course. This decision means that faculty resources are more efficiently used and that students can be fully integrated into the department. Faculty members, describing the applied program at Oklahoma University, have argued that students benefit from the mixture of traditional and applied sociology. Students feel less isolated when placed in classes together.

Graduate faculty members have attempted to strengthen the applied nature of their courses. Surely, a less demanding task than deletion and addition to the curriculum. Faculty have been responsive, recognizing the need for adjustment and improvements. Much of the research by faculty has taken an applied direction.

Problems Encountered

Faculty, both within and outside of the department, have been very cooperative while struggling with interdisciplinary

applied work. Sociology faculty have questioned the appropriateness of applied work; most are satisfied that applied sociology is academically rigorous and will not dilute the substance of our mission. More than half of the department faculty are interested and involved with the program. If we had chosen the route of proposing new courses, making new course preparations, developing internships and initiating faculty involvement in applied research, the responses from faculty might have been less than encouraging. The key is simply that sociology is applied; it requires a slightly different exercise of the sociological imagination.

Faculty from other departments were helpful and cooperative, offering advise as to which courses within their curricula would be most appropriate for our purposes. The major obstacle external to the department was the question of duplication. Some of the disciplines related to sociology, eg. criminal justice, already had degree programs in place that were interdisciplinary and applied. To make a long story short, negotiations over an academic year resolved these problems and allowed us to proceed.

The Internship

Almost every applied program that we reviewed provides some form of field experience for applied students. Even though a number of students at the graduate level will have experience in organizational settings, they have not used sociological problem solving techniques in these same organizations. Younger students will have only limited

experience, if any at all, in organizational settings outside the university. We have, therefore, initiated an aggressive program in connection with our proposed Research Institute for Community Enhancement to develop contacts with public agencies and business organizations that will lead to appropriate internship experiences for our applied students. This organizational involvement will come toward the end of what will typically be a two-year program for most applied students. Students may return to their employing organizations, where appropriate, or internships may be found for them in organizations in the local area.

In summary, the MAIS program has several advantages over an in-house program. It can be initially developed with no extra faculty and a limited amount of program costs. Existing curriculum can be used until appropriate additions can be made to the course inventory. Finally, assuming that employers are looking for practical skills that go beyond departmental boundaries, the selection of courses from various departments that emphasize skill related areas is a major advantage.

Research Institute for Community Enhancement

Teaching applied sociology requires doing applied sociology. Students being trained for applied social science research and/or administrative positions need supervised experience. Faculty teaching in applied programs need opportunities for their own applied research. Community organizations, both

private and public, have questions and problems that could be clarified or resolved by social science information and expertise. A research institute or center can meet these needs and concerns.

The Research Institute for Community Enhancement, in its formative stages at this time, is modeled on similar institutes or centers at other universities (Park et al, 1981; Ohio University 1980). It is interdisciplinary with sociologists, a social worker, and anthropologists serving on its steering committee. For a year the institute will be run on a pilot basis, involving students and faculty within this multi-disciplinary department. After an evaluation period, the institute will attempt to involve other social science departments and faculty in the university to broaden the skills and expertise available to do client defined and funded research.

The institute will be funded by client projects and department resources. While seed money from traditional funding agencies is being sought and would be welcome, from our point of view, an applied institute can be developed out of existing resources and from the research projects it undertakes.

In a three week period, faculty members of the institute made external contacts: two social service; five government, and four middle to small industries. Each was asked to complete a questionnaire. Only one declined to provide opportunities for interns. A number of potential research projects were proposed by the contacts. Some will be of

sociological significance. For example, why does participative management succeed in the north but fail in the south? We believe the institute will provide a mechanism for inter-disciplinary cooperation, improve both faculty and student skill development, and serve the community.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The pattern of education in sociology in recent decades has been to train new sociologists, most of whom would find employment in academe, and to introduce students with other career and disciplinary majors to the sociological imagination, methodology, and research. Clearly, something is wrong. Enrollments and majors have declined. Academic openings for doctoral sociologists have declined severely. Applied sociology has been one response to these changes. What effects might applied sociology have on the future of the discipline?

First, sociology can change, and the change can benefit the discipline. Decades ago, Mills (1959) argued that sociology tended to be either grand theory or abstracted empiricism. Today, sociology is perceived by students, policy decision makers, and much of the public, as a discipline without direction. Sociology has direction and purpose: to describe and explain the social world. The breadth of scope of the discipline can be put to practical purposes and to benefit those who have problems for study. Advances in theory, research design, and analysis have been stimulated by applied research in the past.

Changing the direction of our teaching can also enhance the discipline and better serve our students. As of this writing, there is no text that introduces the student to sociology by demonstrating the utility of sociological knowledge to personal and work-related problems. Instead, students are treated to a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of conflict theory versus functionalism versus symbolic interactionism versus exchange theory. While we as sociologists may care passionately about these issues, it is unlikely that the introductory student does.

Second, internships mean more work and a different kind of work. Effective internships require faculty involvement. Finding a suitable intern location, negotiating with the student's work supervisor, helping the student make sense of his or her experience, defining a research problem, designing a research instrument, and analyzing the results all require significant effort by a faculty member. Those of us new to applied sociology may experience some adjustment problems. Learning to communicate on a professional basis but outside of academia can be difficult for faculty. Defining research issues primarily in terms of a client's needs rather than professional interest and/or theoretical perspective may be a challenge that some faculty do not wish to pursue. Our preliminary needs assessment suggests that there are more research opportunities available for us than we might find the time or energy to undertake.

Third, as we demonstrate to students, the public, and ourselves that sociology is a useful discipline, we may benefit the discipline and ourselves in one place where we all know it counts - classroom enrollments and majors. Without a strong undergraduate enrollment, the base of existence of sociology is in doubt. With such a foundation, the future of the discipline is ensured. Perhaps it is unnecessary to mention that the major advances in sociology have come from university faculty, supported by their undergraduate and graduate instruction.

A crisis exists in sociology today one that threatens the institutional survival of the discipline. We can hold-on, accept our decline gracefully, or attempt to give students of sociology an academically sound education that is useful for employment. One department has taken three steps to achieve this goal: a bachelor of science in applied sociology; a multi-disciplinary, multi-track masters in applied sociology; and the formation of an applied research institute designed to coordinate internships and enhance community development. We can affect the future of our discipline if we choose to do so.

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